

Interview With Jacobo Goldstein of CNN Radio Noticias

May 1, 1997

Mexico and Drug Trafficking

Mr. Goldstein. Mr. President, let's start with Mexico. You're going down there on Monday. The news today is that Mexico just dismantled its antidrug agency and has put a new agency in place with new trainees. Will this stop the corruption that has been so rampant?

The President. Well, I think there's a good chance that it will improve things. Keep in mind the Mexicans have a big challenge. This is not just something they—this co-operation we're undertaking in the antidrug area from Mexico's point of view is not primarily for the United States. Of course, we want to reduce the number of illegal drugs coming into America. Primarily, it's for Mexico. It's to preserve the social, political, and economic integrity of the country.

And I think this is a very good first step. I've had a good relationship with President Zedillo and with Mexico since I became President. I've done everything I could do to try to make sure America is a good neighbor and a good partner for the future. And I think this will enable us to work more closely together in that area.

Mr. Goldstein. Mr. President, Mexico is going to have midterm elections that are going to be watched throughout the world. And I know President Zedillo has been trying to change some of old time and change the structure of his party. What are your expectations of these midterm elections? It's the first time the mayor of Mexico City is going to be elected.

The President. I don't know. My only expectations are that they'll be free and fair and that they will express the will of the Mexican people and that we will support that, whatever that is.

NAFTA

Mr. Goldstein. Mr. President, NAFTA, according to the numbers, seems to be working. Do you expect the U.S. Congress to help push NAFTA to Chile fast track? And you have spoken, and your people have spoken, how important Latin America is as far as a

trading partner, but does Congress share your view, sir?

The President. I believe a majority do. I am, frankly, disappointed and surprised that there is still so much opposition to expanding fast track. NAFTA has been a big success for us, with Canada and with Mexico. It has helped the Mexican economy to grow. It has brought our two countries closer together. When Mexico had a difficult time economically, the United States made the loan that—I made the decision to make a loan to Mexico, and they paid the loan back early with interest and a profit. And it's working well. It's creating more jobs for Mexico, more jobs for the United States.

And I think we would be very, very, very shortsighted if we did not extend fast track, go down and involve Chile and then eventually complete the promise of the Summit of the Americas—involve the Andean nations, the MERCOSUR nations, all the nations, Latin America, Central America, Caribbean in the trade area of the Americas. That's what I want to do, and I'm going to keep pushing for it.

Mexico-U.S. Relations

Mr. Goldstein. Mr. President, you placed great importance on the relations with Mexico, personal relation between you and President Zedillo. And now the word is out, you're going to be naming a very famous politician of the other party, the Governor of Massachusetts, Governor William Weld. How will this create better relations between you and Mexico?

The President. Well, if Governor Weld's appointment goes through, I would expect it to greatly strengthen our relationships because I think that they will have a lot in common and that the three of us will all have a good relationship, which will facilitate our countries growing closer together and working better together.

Mr. Goldstein. Will he have direct access to you and Madeleine Albright?

The President. Oh, absolutely. I know him well. I mean, he is a member of the other party, and when he ran against Senator Kerry last year, I worked very hard for Senator Kerry. But we have a good personal relationship. He's a highly intelligent man, and

he and I are clearly on the same wavelength in terms of what we believe our policy toward Mexico and, indeed, toward all Latin America should be.

The President's Meeting With President Zedillo

Mr. Goldstein. Finally, Mr. President, I want to touch slightly the issue of human rights. There has been some criticism of violation of human rights in Mexico. Will the subject of human rights be broached during the bilateral meeting, or will you deal—with President Zedillo?

The President. I expect we will discuss everything that is out there to be discussed in our relationship. We have a very open and candid relationship. If he has some problems with the United States, he feels free to raise them with me. And we'll talk through everything I think we should talk through.

Immigration

Mr. Goldstein. Migrations—the new migration laws have created a huge stir in Mexico and Central America, also—the issue, that will come up?

The President. It will come up, and it should. I would like to make three points. First of all, there were provisions dealing with legal immigrants tacked onto the welfare reform bill that had nothing to do with welfare reform that I strongly opposed and that will have to be significantly changed if we are going to get a budget agreement here with the Republican Congress. I have told them that, and we're working hard on it.

Secondly, with regard to the law dealing with illegal immigration, I know that there are some questions about that law in Latin America. But let me point out, the main thing the law does is to give us extra tools to control our borders, to deal with illegal immigrants in our workplaces and who come into the criminal justice system.

We are going to work very hard to avoid any draconian interpretation of the law that would lead to any kind of mass deportations or anything of that kind. But keep in mind, the United States admitted last year 960,000 legal immigrants. We are now the fifth largest Hispanic country in the world, with 22 million Hispanic-Americans here. So we are

committed to open immigration and to having more people here from the Americas, but we have to do it in a legal way that has some discipline and order and integrity to it. And we will try to do it in a fair and balanced way.

Mexico-U.S. Trade and NAFTA

Mr. Goldstein. Mr. President, there was some concern in Mexico when Mexican trucks were not allowed—truckers to drive in this country. I'm sure that issue will also come up.

The President. It will come up. President Zedillo would bring it up if I didn't. We will—we're trying to work that out. Our concerns here are basically safety concerns, and we have an obligation under NAFTA, the United States does, to permit Mexican truckers into the United States if they meet the standards that we apply to our people. And we're trying to work out exactly how we define that and resolve it with the Mexicans.

There have been actually relatively few trade disputes. This is now a \$130 billion trade relationship. It's a huge relationship. And we have two or three relatively minor matters—[inaudible]—all but one. And I think we have to work very hard to try to rectify the economic harm done to the Caribbean countries inadvertently by Congress when they adopted NAFTA but wouldn't go along with my suggestion to give the same treatment to the Caribbean countries.

Mr. Goldstein. Excuse me, by Caribbean you mean Central America and the Caribbean Basin?

The President. Caribbean Basin, absolutely. All the Caribbean Basin countries. We did not—I don't think the Congress meant to hurt them by passing NAFTA, but I told them what I was afraid would happen. I asked them to at least maintain the status quo, so that they wouldn't lose any ground compared to Mexico because Mexico's great gains have come from the labors of the Mexican people and from the transfer of some production from Asia back to Mexico. They never intended to take anything away from the Central America and Caribbean countries.

So we have to rectify that because those countries have to have a chance to grow. Oth-

erwise, the more successful Mexico is in its antidrug efforts, the more vulnerable the Caribbean countries will be—especially the Caribbean, even more than Central America. They will become even more vulnerable to drug traffickers because they won't be able to make a living there. So we've got to rectify this, and I'm hoping to resolve it with this session of Congress.

Immigration

Mr. Goldstein. Mr. President, the Central American countries will also bring up the immigration issue because El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras—they were all deeply affected in the eighties during the liberation or revolution, the civil wars of the eighties.

The President. They—because of the unique status that they bore when they came into this country, they are in a position different from legal immigrants or plainly illegal immigrants. They are in a different position. And we've already had one discussion, interestingly enough, about that today. We're trying to work that out in a way that seems fair and humane and balanced, and I hope we can.

Hostage Situation in Peru

Mr. Goldstein. Mr. President, I would like to ask you two questions as they're pushing me out. One has to do with Peru. You were very much involved, your country was, with Japan during the hostage crisis, which came to a conclusion a few days ago.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Goldstein. There seems to be some rumblings about some possible human rights violations when the army barged in and saved the hostages. Do you know anything about it or—

The President. No.

Mr. Goldstein. —have you had any conversations with Mr. Fujimori?

The President. I do not know what the facts are on that. I do know that the Government of Peru was very patient for a long time, that the people who took the hostages were terrorists who threatened their lives, and that it was a good thing and remarkable that only one of them was—life was lost in the rescue attempt. But I do not know what the facts

were about what happened on the compound.

Cuba

Mr. Goldstein. Mr. President, finally, you know Cuba is an issue. Helms-Burton has created a rift—between Latin America and the United States because of Cuba and Helms-Burton. Do you visualize any circumstances under which Helms-Burton could be lifted? And do you feel this will not threaten your commercial relations and political relations with the Latin American nations?

The President. Well, first of all, I think the biggest problem with Helms-Burton, vis-a-vis Latin America, may well have been solved by the resolution we made with the European Union about the interpretation of Helms-Burton. And I think if we look at what happened with the European Union, what we want the other democracies of Central America and Caribbean and South America to do, is to work with us on promoting openness, human rights, and freedom in Cuba, and we need to do that every way we can.

Now, under the statute, the Helms-Burton statute, about the only agreements I can work out are the ones that—like we worked out with Europe. That law supplanted a bill that I liked very much, the Cuba Democracy Act, which gave the United States the flexibility to be both more open and tougher with Cuba, depending on the facts. But that law was passed by Mr. Castro himself. He passed the law as surely as if he'd been here voting on it when he shot down those planes and killed those innocent people.

So we're doing the best we can with the law we have, but we all need to keep working for greater openness in Cuba. I think the only prospects for a change in the law would be those that are, again, completely within the control of the Cuban Government and of Mr. Castro. I mean, if he were to evidence some changes, then he might get some changed attitudes here. But we've got to see what happens.

NAFTA

Mr. Goldstein. Finally, Mr. President, you—during your first term, you fought very hard for NAFTA against your own party. You

fought very hard to save Mexico—the economic bailout against people of your own party including. Will you fight as hard now that you don't need to run for reelection? Political considerations aside, will you fight just as hard to make sure that Latin America has a free trade agreement?

The President. Oh, sure.

Mr. Goldstein. It may take about a year or two. And are you optimistic you can do it by the year 2005, as they said in Miami at the Summit of the Americas?

The President. Well, yes, I will fight just as hard. And I will certainly—there are no political considerations for me one way or the other now. I would like to point out we did get quite a large number of Democrats who supported NAFTA and that the leadership in both parties supported me with the Mexican loan.

I'm quite concerned that there may have been an erosion of support for the free trade concept in the Americas, not just in the Democratic Party but in the Republican Party as well. And I find this surprising. Here we are now at the pinnacle of our economic success, political influence in the world, but the only way we can exercise our political influence for good is to become involved with other countries. And it disappoints me when I hear Americans who seemed to be reluctant to do that. I think that's a mistake. And so I'm going to try to persuade them to do the right thing from my point of view, and I believe we'll win.

Budget Agreement

Mr. Goldstein. And will you get a budget agreement? Everybody in the basement asked me to ask you——

The President. I don't know. I hope so.

Mr. Goldstein. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The interview began at 11:42 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to President Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico; President Alberto Fujimori of Peru; and President Fidel Castro of Cuba. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Statement on the Interim Report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses

May 1, 1997

I appreciate the ongoing, rigorous work of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, and I welcome their interim letter report.

The care and well-being of our Gulf war veterans is a national duty and a national priority. That is why I appointed the Committee in May 1995, extended its mandate in January 1997, and directed its attention in February 1997 to the recently released intelligence documents concerning possible chemical exposures.

I am determined that my administration will do everything necessary to uncover all the facts and act on any relevant information, to provide our Gulf war veterans with the quality medical care they need, and to make sure that in any future troop deployments, we draw on lessons learned in the Gulf war to better protect the health of our troops and their families.

This interim report, like those that preceded it, will help us meet that responsibility in an increasingly effective way. I have asked the Secretaries of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Health and Human Services, as well as the Acting Director of Central Intelligence, to study the report and, 2 weeks from today, provide me their proposals for implementing the Committee's recommendations.

To further strengthen our search for the facts, Secretary Cohen and Acting DCI Tenet have asked former Senator Warren Rudman to review the results of their ongoing investigations related to Gulf war illnesses and to offer appropriate recommendations. Senator Rudman brings solid expertise and sound judgment to this important job. I am confident he will assist the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency in ensuring their investigations are thorough and will also enhance our ability to integrate Gulf war intelligence "lessons learned" into our future planning.

I am grateful for the PAC's dedication and persistence, and look forward to their continued, indispensable efforts to make sure no stone is left unturned on behalf of America's